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ABSTRACT

The SEEK (Search for Education, Elevation, and Knowledge) Program at the City University of New York (CUNY) was designed to provide access to any senior college in the CUNY structure for a population that had previously been excluded. To be eligible for participation in the program, the student must be a resident of New York City and reside in one of the designated poverty areas, must possess a high school diploma or its equivalent, and must not have attended college previously unless a veteran. Since these students are in need of remedial and supportive services, the SEEK Program was designed with three components to serve those needs: remedial and supportive instructional services, counseling services, and financial assistance. Because of the institution of the SEEK Program and the Open Admission Policy, Bernard M. Baruch College of CUNY established the Department of Compensatory Programs in 1970. The department is responsible for providing remedial and supportive instructional services to any student who, by virtue of a a placement examination, requires these services to successfully meet degree requirements for graduation. The communications skills program within the Department of Compensatory Programs is described. (TO)

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A COMMUNICATION SKILLS PROGRAM FOR COLLEGE STUDENTS: AN ADMINISTRATIVE PERSPECTIVE

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INTRODUCTION

In July, 1966, the New York Legislature enacted legislation to establish the SEEK Program at the City University of New York, (CUNY). The SEEK (Search for Education, Elevation and Knowledge) Program was designed to provide access to any senior college in the CUNY structure for a large population who had previously been excluded. There were two basic characteristics of this excluded population. First, they lacked the financial means to attend college and second, their academic performance in high school disqualified them under regular college adimssion standards.

It was apparent to the legislators that these students would be in need of remedial and supportive services if they were to successfully complete the requirements for graduation. Therefore, the SEEK Program was designed with three components: (1) Remedial and supportive instructional services, (2) Counseling services, and (3) Financial assistance. To better identify the population that would be eligible for participation in the program, the following criteria were established.

1. The student must be a resident of New York City and reside in one of the designated poverty areas.
2. The student must posess a higm shcool diploma or its equivalent.
3. The student must not be more than thirty years of age.
4. The student must not have attended college previously. (This rule is waived if the applicant is a veteran).

In the fall, 1970, the City University instituted an "Open Admissions Policy." This policy also provided access to college

for a large population who had previously been excluded. The only criteria for admission under this policy was the student must be a resident of New York City. This also meant that any student who was not accepted into the SEEK Program would be eligible to attend college under the Open Admission Policy.[1]

As a result of the institution of these two programs and the realization that there would be an additional influx of underprepared students, in September 1970, Bernard M. Baruch College of CUNY established the Department of Compensatory Programs. This department houses the SEEK Program, as well as, provides remedial and supportive services, excluding financial assistance, to the non-SEEK student population.

1. SEEK students are selected by a lottery system. When a student submits an application, this does not mean he/she is automatically accepted into the program. Their lottery number must be selected.

SEEK AND NON-SEEK ASSIGNMENTS TO THE DEPARTMENT OF COMPENSATORY PROGRAMS

The department of Compensatory Programs is responsible for providing remedial and supportive instructional services to any student who by virtue of a placement examination requires these services to successfully meet degree requirements for graduation. SEEK students are assigned to the department for the duration of their college experience regardless of whether they are in need of remedial services or not. Conversely, the non-SEEK students are assigned to the department until they have completed their remedial work.

Depending on the amount of remediation needed, SEEK and non-SEEK students are permitted to enroll in the regular college academic program. Upon completion of the remedial sequence, the non-SEEK students are then referred to the curricular guidance service of the school of their major course of study, (i.e. Business, Liberal Arts, or Education). All academic programing for these students is then performed by the curricular guidance service until that students graduates.

The SEEK students remain with the department until they have completed their prerequisite and the remedial courses of study. Upon completion of this portion of their course of study, which is generally three to five semesters, depending upon the amount of remediation needed; they too, are referred to the curricular guidance service of their major course of study. Many of the SEEK and non-SEEK students do maintain some level of contact

with the department after their referral. In many instances they continue using the personal counseling services as well as other supportive services offered by the department. This is not to say that they maintain the contact because they are experiencing difficulties. Generally, the services are used to maintain or raise their achievement level as well as assist their peers in courses they have completed.

PLACEMENT TESTING

All students entering the college are required to take a battery of freshmen placement examinations which are administered by the Department of Compensatory Programs. The battery is composed of a mathematics examination, writing sample, and a standardized reading test. The results of the three examinations determine the student's need, if any, for remedial work. Students who receive a passing grade in each of the examinations are permitted to enroll in regular college level courses. Students receiving a below passing grade are assigned to remedial courses depending on the extent of skill deficiency. For example, students who have severe writing problems are placed in the Communication Skills sequence which is an interdisciplinery approach to skill development. These students receive instruction from the reading, English, and speech faculty who function as a team in identifying and correcting skill defeciencies. Students who are capable of writing with fewer errors are assinged to the corrective English 1.1 or English 1 sequence. The reading examination determines whether a student is to be assigned to a non-credit reading study lab.

Students whose writing samples indicate that they have multiple skill deficiencies are assigned to Communication Skills. The Communication Skills course is a cooperative venture of the Compensatory Programs, Speech and English departments to develop basic college skills for students who are underprepared. The course is nine hours for two semesters. It is team taught by reading, English and Speech faculty. Upon completion of all three components (Reading, English, and Speech) the student receives seven credits.

COMMUNICATION SKILLS

The Communication Skills sequence was initiated as an experimental course in spring 1973. During the fall of 1973, the Communication Skills course was approved by the schools of Business, Liberal Arts and Education to be added to the regular college curriculum. The 1973-74 academic year was a positive learning experinece for both the students and faculty in Communication Skills. Faculty who heretofore worked in isolation with their students for the first time were responsible for coordinating their teaching efforts with colleagues from other disciplines. Together they learned about themselves and developed strategies for students to successfully complete college tasks.

Although writing criteria are used primarily for Communication Skills placement, in the both the fall and spring of the 1973-74 academic year 98% of the students assigned to Communication Skills had writing and reading deficiencies. There is a close association at the college level with writing and organizing skills and reading skills needed for college courses.

In general, the approach used by the teams (reading, English and Speech faculty) is to help students identify their academic strengths which then are used to develop other skills. For example, the reading instructor may have the students read a variety of materials that relate to a core topic such as urban transportation. In reading materials from texts, magazine reprints, and newspaper articles, the students are given the assignment to determine the main idea of each selection. Then they

relate the main idea to other selections they have read and their own experience. The skills developed by the reading instructor are reinforced by the English and Speech faculty. The English instructor may give the students an opportunity or write about a problem that affects them; citing a minimum of two reference sources. An informative speech or a debate may be assigned to fulfill the speech requirements. It is important for the students to see the natural carry over of basic skills to all college courses. Thus the reading faculty require written assignments and provide varied opportunities for classroom discussion.

Exit criteria is based on a combination of weekly assignments, classroom participation, regular attendance in class and individual conferences, and a research project. The research project requires the student to select a topic and use a variety of references to develop a main thought. Students are required to be familiar with library reference materials and can supplement their references with personal interviews and television reviews.

The Communication Skills sequence permits counselors and faculty to cooperatively work out ways to help students in distress. A counselor is notified whenever a student has more than two consecutive unexcused absences. The counselor contacts the student to see if he or she can be of help, if there is a problem. Students who are new to the college seldom get a sense of loneliness and defeat when they receive this type of attention. Communication Skills faculty offer suggestions to counselors about courses students should take based on the students' skill development and innate academic strengths. In many cases counselors are invited to class sessions and faculty team meetings so that they fully understand

the students' assignments. The articulation between the counseling staff and the faculty has helped the students and the program develop a closeness that is impossible to measure in dollars and cents. For example, there was a Communication Skills team having difficulty with a group of in-coming freshmen who resented being placed in a remedial course. The faculty involved spent many hours planning activities and encouraging the students, with the assistance of a counselor. Student attitudes changed by the end of the semester, to the extent that a nucleous of the students from that team planned and supervised a Christmas celebration for all Communication Skills faculty and students. The attitude of resentment about the course changed to one of security in understanding that they were acquiring skills to help them succeed in college. This is but one example of the positive aspects of the Communication Skills program.

The Department of Compensatory Programs also offers the following instructional services:

1. Writing Workshop
2. Study Labs
3. Graduate Fellow/Peer Tutorial
4. English as a Second Language Laboratory

The following is a brief description of each of the above services.

READING-WRITING WORKSHOP

The Writing Workshop is designed to provide an informal setting for students to work independently and/or receive assistance from a faculty person. It is also designed to provide students with a place to study and receive special assistance with writing or research assignments from regular and/or remedial courses.

The Reading/Writing Workship is a study laboratory that provides diagnostic and developmental instruction. In cases where a student may have missed taking the reading placement examination or was incorrectly assessed, a reading specialist administers an individual reading examination. The results of this examination are sent to Director of Remedial Instruction and all possible adjustments are made in the student's course selections.

This particular service has helped both the Department of Compensatory Programs and the curricular guidance offices in developing programs that better meet the needs of the students. Instructors and/or counselors at times assign students to the Writing Workshop to develop skills. In most cases this involves the development of writing techniques and reading skills. The workshop contains a limited variety of texts, pleasure reading books and periodicals. Many of the faculty and counselors in the Department of Compensatory Programs have provided supplementary texts and periodicals for the students. There is a check out system so that students can take out materials overnight.

The Writing Workshop is designed to promote individual or small group study in an informal atmosphere. Since the Workshop is located on the same floor as the Department's counselors' offices, it makes it quite convenient for a student to drop by to see his counselor between classes, or go to the Workshop and study. The study lab faculty are in close contact with the reading specialists. Often an instructor will supply appropriate supplementary materials for a student to practice with under the direction of the Workshop instructor.

STUDY LABS

The study labs develop and reinforce college level skills using introductory college courses as co-requisites. The study labs were developed with the intention of developing reading skills relevant to a particular area of knowledge, with the expectation that the skill achievement would be used in other subjects. Students who scored below the 38th percentile on the Stanford Achievement Test and not assigned to Communication Skills are eligible to attend the study labs.

The study labs meet for two hours weekly. Although the students do not receive college credit, the class hours are counted as contact hours. Hence full time students receiving financial assistance are not penalized for taking a study lab.

Study labs are offered for the following subjects:

1. Art
2. Biology
3. Black Studies
4. English As a Second Language
5. History
6. Music
7. Philosophy
8. Political Science
9. Psychology
10. Sociology

INTERFACE WITH OTHER DEPARTMENTS IN THE COLLEGE

The Department of Compensatory Programs is in a very unique position. This position permits the department to be a change-agent because not only are we responsible to students but we are responsible to our colleagues as well.

Interface with other departments in the college is both formal and informal. Formally there are scheduled co-requisite study labs, which follow the course outline of the content area professor, with strict emphasis on developing college skills.

We confine our instruction in the study labs to: (1) note taking and outlining techniques, (2) methods of preparing classroom presentations, (3) techniques in preparing for objective and essay examinations, (4) general content review to improve reading comprehension for details and main ideas. This formal arrangement has had the cooperation of department heads and the school deans. The informal interface is generally done via casual lunch or telephone conversation with department heads and or faculty, to discuss particular student needs or subject concepts. Sometimes we video tape classroom lectures, with the co- requisite professor's permission, and review the content in the study lab.

In working with our colleagues in various departments throughout the college it is our responsibility to ascertain the expectations they have projected for students to meet the requirements of their course offerings. It is then the responsibility of the departemnt of Compensatory Programs to translate these requirements into a skill oriented curriculm in order to reduce the incidence of student failure. Esentially we talk about what is expected from a Baruch

graduate.

Baruch College like many urban schools has students who represent a variety of cultures and who speak several languages in addition to English. At times for some of these students there is an intrusion of their native language which causes problems with English. Many of these students are American citizens and are entitled to the college's services. For this reason an English As A Second Language (ESL) program is currently being developed in the Department of Compensatory Programs.

The purpose of the ESL program is to minimize language interference for students for whom English is not their primary language.

The E.S.L. labs meet twice weekly for two hours like the other labs and offer contact hours. Unlike the other labs, they are not correlated with a college introductory course. Prior to the fall 1973 semester students voluntarily signed up for the labs or were referred by faculty or counselors once the semester began.

In the spring 1974 semester a simple one-page questionnaire was administered as part of the placement examination. People who indicated the English was not their first language were orally interviewed during the first week of classes. Schedules were created around content courses and remedial courses to allow the E.S.L. students to meet with a graduate assistant trained in E.S.L. They worked on listening exercises, using tapes prepared specifically for E.S.L. students, and concentrated on error detection. Conversations were recorded, analyzed, and corrected by the groups. They wrote group compositions and worked on correcting pronunciation errors. The group sizes ranged from two to seven and were arranged according to the student's level of English competency and other courses.

IMPLICATIONS FOR RESEARCH

We have briefly described an innovative program that attempts to meet a variety of student needs through remedial, corrective and tutorial programs. There are definite implications for research that will firmly support or challenge the very positive feelings that faculty and staff express. Research can and should be two-fold. First there must be a way of recording the success these students have in regular college. Second there must be a way of carefully evaluating each of the instructional services on a semester by semester basis to determine whether that service is meeting its primary objective, providing students with the skills needed to successfully complete a course of study leading to a baccalaureate degree.